

LISBURN & CASTLEREAGH CITY COUNCIL

Minutes of the Remote Meeting of the Governance and Audit Committee held on Thursday, 8 December, 2022 at 6:00 pm

PRESENT IN CHAMBER:

Alderman D Drysdale
Councillor Jenny Palmer (Vice-Chairperson)
Aldermen J Baird, S Martin and J Tinsley
Councillor A Swan

PRESENT IN REMOTE LOCATION:

The Right Worshipful the Mayor
Councillor S Carson
Aldermen O Gawith and S P Porter
Councillors D J Craig, J Gallen and John Palmer

INDEPENDENT MEMBER:

Mr E Jardine (present in Chamber)

IN ATTENDANCE:

In Chamber:

Director of Finance and Corporate Services
Director of Service Transformation
Head of Finance
Head of Planning & Capital Development
Performance Improvement Officer
Risk Officer
IT Officer
Member Services Officers

In Remote Location:

Chief Executive
Internal Audit Manager

Northern Ireland Audit Office

Mr P O'Sullivan (attending remotely)

Commencement of the Meeting

At the commencement of the meeting, the Chairman, Alderman D Drysdale, welcomed those present to the meeting of the Governance and Audit Committee. He pointed out that the meeting would be audio recorded unless the item on the agenda was considered under confidential business.

At this point, the Member Services Officer read out the names of the Elected Members and Officers in attendance at the meeting.

The Chairman asked that mobile phones be put on silent or switched off for the duration of the meeting. The Director of Finance and Corporate Services outlined the evacuation procedures in the case of an emergency.

The Chairman welcomed to the meeting Mr P O'Sullivan, Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO).

1. Apologies (00:02:13)

It was agreed to accept apologies for non-attendance at the meeting on behalf of the Deputy Mayor, Councillor M Guy, and Councillors S Lowry, G McCleave and C McCready.

2. Declarations of Interest (00:03:00)

There were no declarations of interest.

3. Report from the Performance Improvement Officer

3.1 Performance Improvement Objectives, Case Studies & Associated KPIs – 2nd Quarter Review (00:03:34)

Members having been provided with a copy of a quarterly monitoring document (covering July to September 2022) and a report from the 'Performance Management System' for the same period, it was proposed Councillor A Swan, seconded by Councillor Jenny Palmer and agreed to recommend that these be approved.

3.2 Complaints Report – Quarter 2 (00:05:02)

Members were provided with, and noted the contents of, a copy of a comparative report taken from the Council's Customer Care System detailing the number of comments, complaints and compliments in Quarter 2 of 2022/23. Councillor Jenny Palmer commended staff for how they addressed issues and communicated with the public, which had led to a reduction in the number of complaints.

3.3 'You Said We Did' on Outcomes for Consultations Report on the Draft Performance Improvement Objectives 2022/23 (00:06:09)

Members having been provided with a 'You Said We Did' update on the additional points raised during 2022 consultation, it was proposed by Alderman J Baird, seconded by Councillor A Swan and agreed to recommend that this be approved.

4. Report from the Risk Officer

4.1 Corporate Risk Register (00:07:30)

The Risk Officer set out in her report, an update in respect of the quarterly review of the Corporate Risk Register. Members were provided with, and noted the contents of, a copy of the Corporate Risk Dashboard. Presentations were made by the Head of Finance in respect of CRR7 Financial Sustainability and by the Head of Planning & Capital Development in respect of CRR4 Capital Programme. A number of Members' queries were responded to and, arising from discussion, it was agreed to recommend that, as part of the overall aim of continuous improvement, a review be carried out in respect of which capital projects would be considered by the Capital Projects Committee and which could be reported to the relevant Committee of Council.

On behalf of Members, Alderman S Martin wished to put on record, best wishes to the Head of Finance in her role as Chair of the Association of Local Government Finance Officers (ALGFO) this year.

Alderman Martin also wished it to be recorded that, over the past number of months, Members had been well-briefed in terms of the risks associated with the current financial outlook. This added a further layer of internal control and he thanked Officers for their efforts in that regard.

5. Report from the Chief Executive

5.1 Changes to Audit Approach for the 2022-23 Audit Cycle (01:05:42)

This item reported by the Director of Finance and Corporate Services.

The Right Worshipful the Mayor, Councillor S Carson, left the meeting during consideration of this item of business (7.10 pm), as did the Director of Service Transformation, Head of Planning & Capital Development and the Risk Officer.

Members noted the contents of correspondence from the NIAO advising of changes to the approach to the 2022-23 cycle. Mr O'Sullivan addressed several raised by Members in relation to this matter and, in particular, took note of:

- (a) concerns regarding the increase in audit fees;
- (b) a request that next year's audit fee be advised at an early date to allow it to be taken account of during consideration of estimates; and
- (c) comments that the audit process should be straightforward, given that the Council was a much smaller entity than many other public sector bodies, its accounting was fairly standard, it did not have a number of treasury components – this should be taken account of when determining the overall audit fee.

6. Any Other Business (01:17:07)

There was no other business.

7. Confidential Business

The matters contained in the confidential report would be dealt with “In Committee” due to containing information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the Council holding that information).

“In Committee”

It was proposed by Alderman S Martin, seconded by Alderman J Baird and agreed that the following matters be considered “in committee”, in the absence of members of the press and public being present (7.19 pm).

7.1 Report by Performance Improvement Officer

7.1.1 NIAO Audit and Assessment Report 2021/22
(Report will be made available post-Council)

Members were provided with, and noted the contents of, a copy of the NIAO Audit and Assessment Report 2021/22, together with a copy of the Certificate of Compliance from NIAO.

Members put on record the fact that the Council having received an unqualified audit in respect of Performance Improvement was testament to the professionalism of its Officers and they were commended for their work. Mr O’Sullivan also thanked staff for their assistance in getting the audit returned to its pre-Covid timeframe.

The Performance Improvement Officer left the meeting at this point (7.26 pm).

7.2 Report by Internal Audit Manager

7.2.1 Internal Audit Progress Report – November 2022
(Report will not be made available)

Members were provided with, and noted the contents of, a copy of an Internal Audit Progress Report – November 2022. This report summarised internal audit work and progress against the Operational Plan since the last meeting of the Committee on 9 June, 2022. A copy of any internal audit reports referred to in the progress report were also provided in full on SharePoint for Members’ information.

7.2.2 Revised Internal Audit 2022/23 Operational Plan
(Report will not be made available)

Members having been provided with a copy of a revised Internal Audit 2022/23 Operational Plan, it was proposed by Alderman J Baird, seconded by Councillor A Swan and agreed to recommend that this be approved.

7.3 Report by Director of Finance and Corporate Services

7.3.1 Report to Those Charged With Governance
(Report will be made available post-Council)

Members were provided with, and noted the contents of, a copy of the Report to Those Charged with Governance. During discussion, the Chief Executive noted comments in relation to the regular updating of the Contracts Register and agreed that a report would be presented to Members on this matter in the New Year.

7.4 Report by Chief Executive

7.4.1 Acceptance of Six Monthly Statements of Assurance for the Period April to September 2022
(Report will not be made available)

Members having been provided with a copy of the six monthly Statements of Assurance, it was agreed to recommend that these be approved.

It was proposed by Alderman S Martin, seconded by Councillor Jenny Palmer and agreed to recommend that, in future, only the Chief Executive's Statement of Assurance be reported to the Committee on a six monthly basis, with this arrangement to be reviewed if necessary.

7.5 Closed Session

In line with good practice and the Governance and Audit Committee Terms of Reference, Members now met with representatives from External Audit and Internal Audit in a closed session, the purpose of which was to afford Members the opportunity to ask questions that may not specifically be addressed as part of an audit.

The following Officers left the Meeting prior to the closed session taking place (7.43 pm): Chief Executive, Director of Finance and Corporate Services, Head of Finance and Member Services Officers.

Resumption of Normal Business

It was proposed by Councillor A Swan, seconded by Alderman J Baird, and agreed to come out of committee.

There being no further business, the meeting was terminated at 8.12 pm.

Mayor/Chairman